(c) Yes, Sir. With the introduction of the system of Third Party Administors (TPAs) in health insurance, the time taken to settle the claims by the public sector general insurance companies is expected to reduce considerably.

Expenditure on cultivation of opium

1705. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) how much money is spent by Government annually on administrative machinery which controls and regulates the legitimate cultivation of opium;

(b) how much foreign exchange is earned by Government from sale of opium every year; and

(c) what is the approximate quantity of opium that is diverted to illicit market and how effective our mechanism is to control it?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI ANANDRAO VITHOBA ADSUL): (a) Sir, a sum of about Rs. 14.83 crore was spent during the Financial Year 2001-02 by Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN) on administrative machinery for the legitimate cultivation of opium.

(b) The amount of foreign exchange earned by Government from the sale of opium during the Financial Year 2001-02 was Rs. 209.41 crore.

(c) As diversion of opium to the illicit market is a clandestine activity, the actual quantity of opium that is diverted is not known. The seizure figures of opium as reported by the various drug law enforcement agencies, however, indicate that there is no significant diversion of opium.

Strict control is exercised by the Central Bureau of Narcotics, Gwalior over licit opium cultivation from the stage of the sowing of opium seeds to the stage of collection of opium produced by the cultivators. The area under opium cultivation is subject to 100% physical measurement and test measurement on random basis by the supervisory officers. At the time of harvesting intensive patrolling and preventive checks are conducted in the poppy growing areas with the help of the Police, the Customs and Central Excise Departments. Other measures include

increased frequency of controls during harvesting, shortening of the period for collection of opium and the continuous increase in the Minimum Qualifying Yield criteria for determining the eligibility of opium cultivators.

Merger of weak banks

1706. SHRI YADLAPATI VENKAT RAO:
SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are considering merger of small and weak banks in the near future;

(b) whether Government's stake in such banks is also likely to be reduced; and

(c) what is Government's stake at present and what is the proposal in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI ANANDRAO VITHOBA ADSUL): (a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Widening of tax net

1707. SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Central Board of Direct Taxes is thinking of expanding the tax net so as to increase the tax revenue;

(b) whether Government are making it mandatory to furnish annual information return along with Income Tax return if any assessee enters into a financial transaction with another one for any big purchase; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI ANANDRAO VITHOBA ADSUL): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Finance Act, 2003 has inserted a new section 285BA in the Income-tax Act providing that any assessee, who enters into any prescribed financial transaction with any other person, shall furnish an Annual Information Return in respect of such financial transactions entered into by him during the financial year. The above section shall be